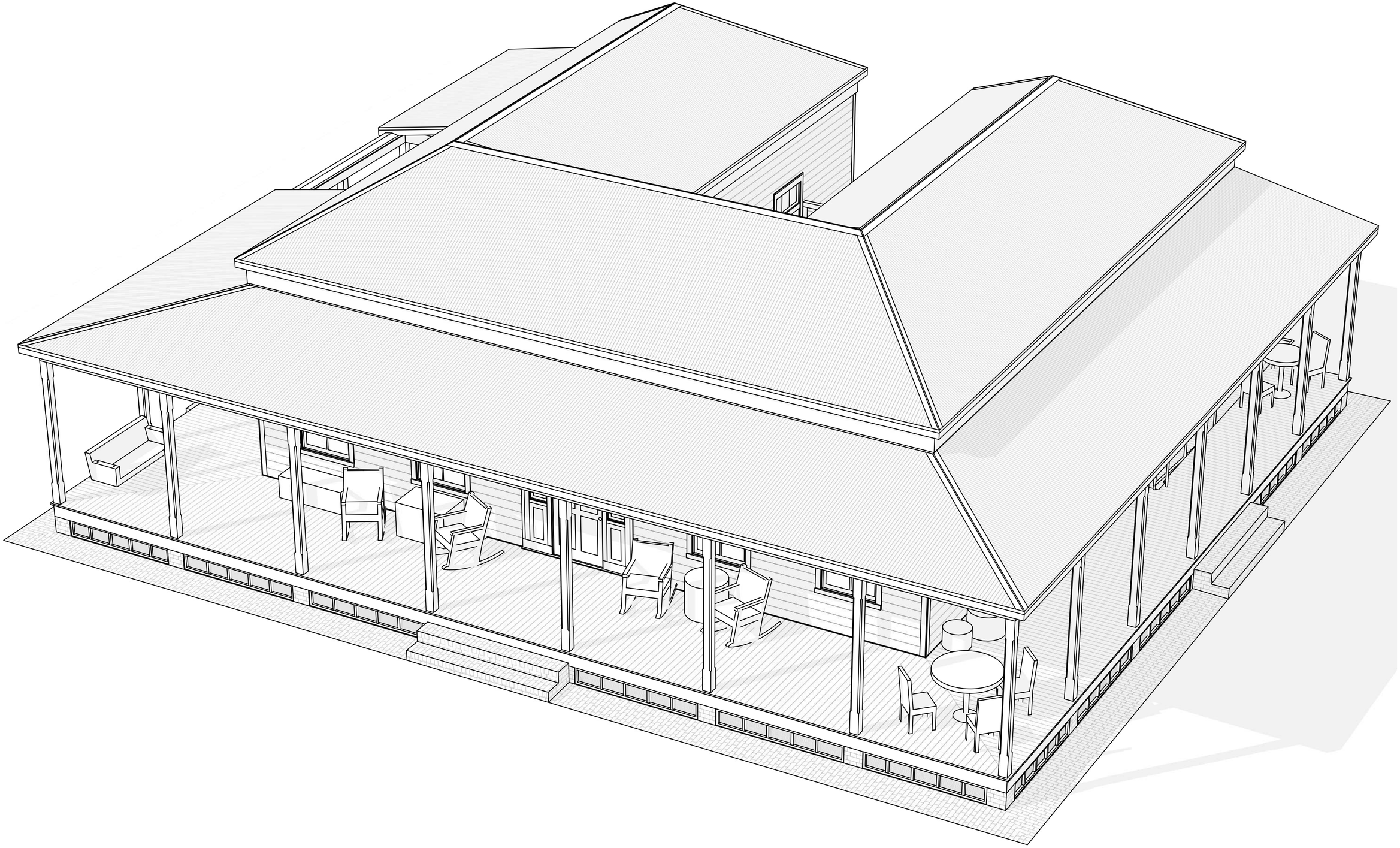


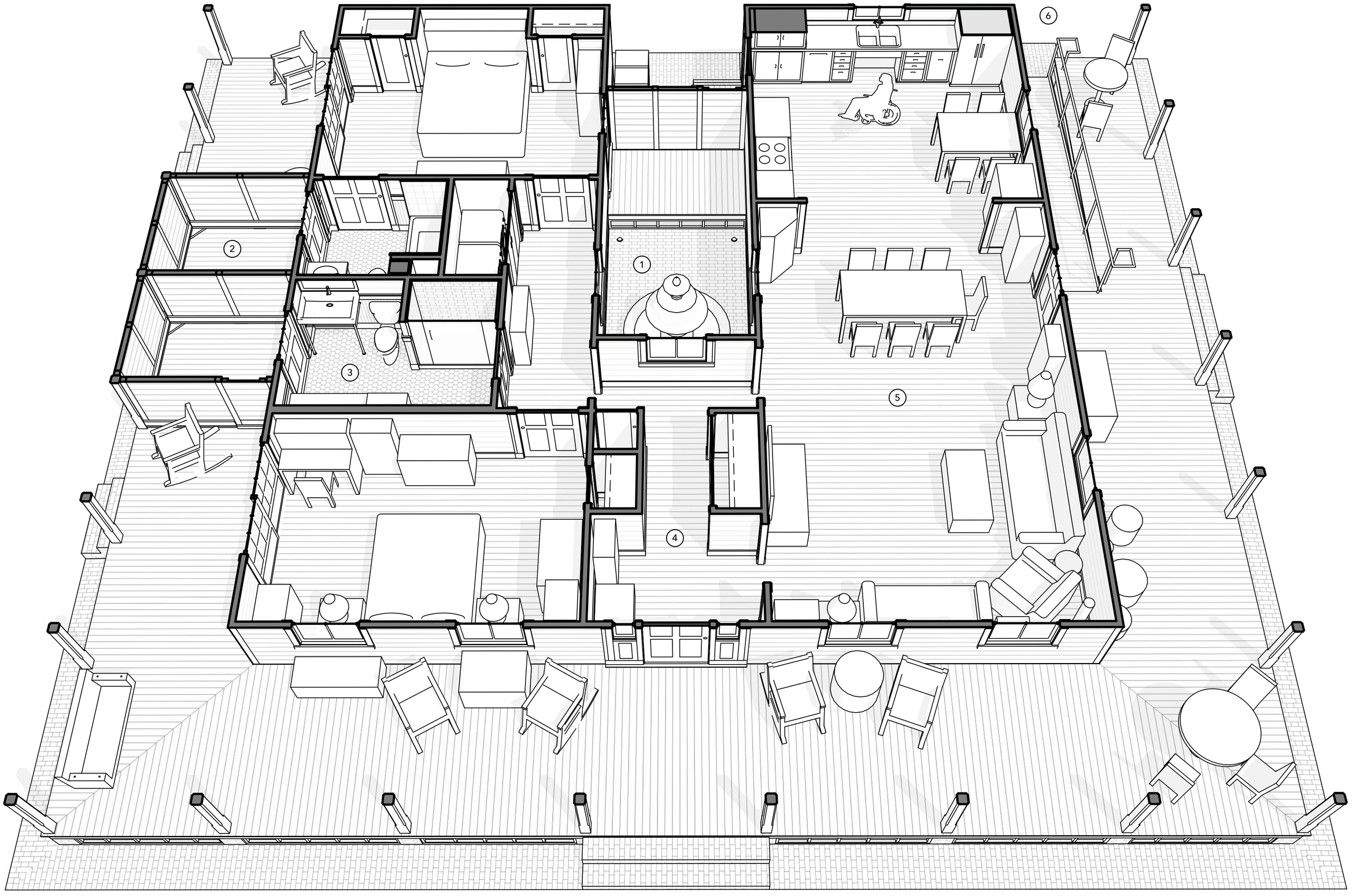
AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

DESIGN OVERVIEW

JAY OSBORNE

This design is based on old farmhouses that can be found all across Australia. With a wrap-around porch and a one-story U-shaped configuration, it has a low profile that helps visually root it to the land. The interior revolves around a central courtyard, which brings in sunlight, and has a focal point visible across the house. This center point is can be personalized with a tree, fountain, pool, sculpture, etc.

From a more practical perspective, two issues formed this design. First, since it's a one-story house, and I don't make them as often, I've worked to make this one wheelchair-accessible. It has wider halls, a large bathroom, a ramp, and more space for manueverability. Second, the design also considers bushfire resistance. If necessary, it can include materials and assemblies optimized for that purpose.



(1) This one-story farmhouse revolves around a central courtyard, shown here with a fountain. Around it, windows frame its view, and allow for cool air and gentle sounds to permeate into the house. **(2)** The wrap-around porch includes some outdoor shower stalls, which give privacy to the main bedroom's porch. **(3)** Wheelchair accessibility is a major idea. The big bathroom can have furniture.

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

FIRST FLOOR

JAY OSBORNE

(4) Upon entry, the centerpiece is straight ahead. That lightwell is the main focus of the interior, bringing in the brightest sunlight, therefore drawing eyes there. **(5)** The living areas are open, which is easier for wheelchairs to navigate. The dining tables can be combined and repositioned for large gatherings. **(6)** The side porch has a ramp leading to the back, where parking and other services would be located.

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

FRONT & RIGHT SIDE

JAY OSBORNE

The wrap-around verandah is the dominant feature of this house's exterior. It can become an extension of the living area. It also protects the house from the sun, including the low afternoon rays. The orientation depends on where it's built. The front (the uppermost view) ideally faces the midday sun. However, vernacular designs are less fragile than modern designs, so solar orientation is not so strict.

(1) The hip roof has an upper cornice, which is very common in old houses. In the hottest climates, the upper roof can blend into the lower-sloped porch roof. **(2)** Crawlspaces are more adaptable (think: utilities) and usually cheap to build. Yet a raised concrete slab is easier to design around wheelchairs and wildfires. Still, there are many reasons for crawlspaces, which is why they are so common.

(1) A ramp leads to the back of the house, the appropriate area for parking and other utilitarian functions. **(2)** The central courtyard has a fence to shield the view of the back, where rubbish bins would be kept. This fence should be low enough to avoid making the courtyard feel cramped and claustrophobic. **(3)** Crawlspace access is to the rear. Screens must be dense to block ember attacks (and bugs).

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

REAR & LEFT SIDE

JAY OSBORNE

(4) The outdoor showers have an opening at the porch roof. These showers use the same sloping, rot- and fire-resistant decking as the rest of the house, with the water draining towards the perimeter landscaping. The privacy fences are lower at the sides, allowing easier access to clotheslines (quite common in Australia). In other words, you could hang laundry from the privacy of these shower stalls.

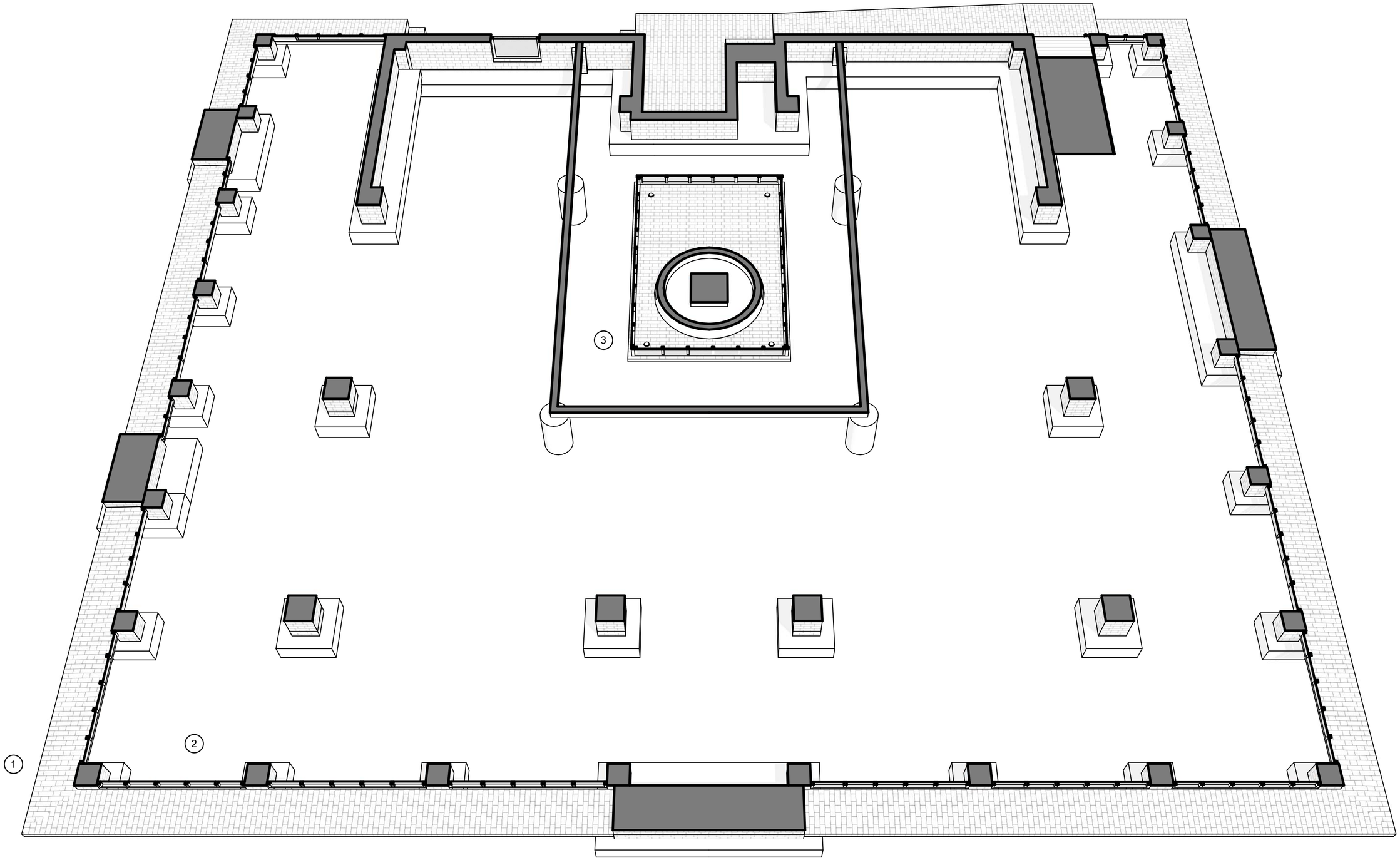
AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

SECTION PERSPECTIVE

JAY OSBORNE

(1) The center couryard has a small deck, where you could sit along the edge. The privacy fence has a gate that should look like the fence (as seen from inside). **(2)** A fountain is shown here, but this centerpiece could be many other things. Three windows face it, making it the heart of the house. **(3)** The foundation is designed so this house could be built around a large tree, with space for roots

(4) The outdoor shower stalls give privacy to many rooms of the house, like the bathrooms, allowing them to have more windows for light and air. **(5)** This wall in the living area bookends the kitchen cabinets, subtly demarcates space, and also structurally braces the long exterior walls. **(6)** The ceilings could be higher than 3 meters (10 feet), but to keep things simple, raised heel trusses are utilized here.



(1) Landscape paving is used around the perimeter, which makes it easier to sweep away debris, provides a small wildfire buffer, and allows for a gutterless porch roof. A perimeter french drain could redistribute water (including runoff from outdoor showers) to the landscaping around the house. **(2)** The crawlspace must be tightly screened to avoid ember intrusion, the biggest wildfire threat.

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

FOUNDATION DESIGN

JAY OSBORNE

(3) A center fountain is shown here, but this crawlspace is designed so the house can be built around a tree. Possibly a large one (but definitely not in wildfire areas). The pier foundations give plenty of space for tree roots. If a smaller (or newly-planted) tree is to be here, then you can just use a root barrier (i.e. copper sheeting) in the ground around the foundation elements, and build it normally.

(1) The wall between the kitchen and living/dining areas not only helps to subtly differentiate between the spaces, but also structurally braces the exterior wall. That means the ceiling could be higher, though you'd need a structural engineer to sign off on that. **(2)** Everything in the house revolves around the central court and the three windows that look into it. It also balances the interior daylighting.

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

INTERIOR VIEWS

JAY OSBORNE

(3) The circulations areas, like these halls, are wide enough for wheelchair usage, and direct everyone around the centerpiece element and lightwell. **(4)** Though the closets could be replaced with large wardrobes instead, they present the opportunity to make a delightful bed alcove, with a simple-to-build arched soffit. It's small, but such features exhibit personality, and therefore a sense of home.

I like the idea of building a house around a tree. A large, widely-branching tree that gives dappled shade, cool air, rustling of leaves, and the chirping of birds. Even if it towers out of view from the center of the house, it's a great reason to open the adjacent windows and feel its presence. From outside, it makes the house change with the seasons and the time of day, connecting it with nature.

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOUSE

TREE CENTERPIECE

JAY OSBORNE

The centerpiece of the house could be something else, more appropriate to its site and situation, or to the personalities of the occupants. My personality leans toward a large tree in the middle, but that's just a reflection of who I am. The best designs allow for creative reinterpretation, yet still frame our desires and place them within practical constraints. How else might this home be personalized?